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COOPERATIVE LEARNING FOR INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: A PILOT STUDY ON TEACHERS' VIEWS AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Ildikó LÁZÁR
Eötvös Loránd University
lazar.ildiko@btk.elte.hu

Abstract

The present study compares the expected learning outcomes of the increasingly popular teaching-learning method called cooperative learning and the components of intercultural competence in order to see whether the former is conducive to the development of the latter. A review of the theoretical background is followed by the analysis of the results of a small-scale survey conducted among teacher participants of professional development workshops. The survey sheds light on the fact that although the principles and expected learning outcomes of cooperative learning are considered essential at school, the majority of the participating public school teachers still rarely use cooperative structures and tend to be unaware of any link between cooperative learning and the competences it develops.

1 Introduction

Although many attempts at promoting change in education have been made all over the world in the past decades, there have been relatively few empirical research projects exploring what language teachers' attitudes are to change and how they respond to 21st century expectations in the classroom. The aims of the present study are, on the one hand, to review the literature on intercultural competence (ICC) and cooperative learning (CL) in language teaching and teacher education in order to explore potential links that might connect them and, on the other hand, to present the findings of a small-scale empirical study that investigated teachers' views on and practice of using cooperative structures in their classes in order to develop competences that they find important.

Intercultural competence, as defined in Section 2.1.1 below, has long occupied a prominent place among the expected learning outcomes of language (teacher) education in both European and Hungarian policy documents (for more details see Section 2.2). At the same time, numerous empirical studies (such as, Byram & Risager, 1999; Sercu, 2001; Lázár, 2007 to be reviewed in Section 2.3), find that many teachers still tend to neglect the development of the attitudes, skills and knowledge that will help learners communicate successfully in intercultural encounters. Along the same lines, using cooperative learning structures (as defined in Section 2.1.2) has become an increasingly popular teaching method especially in theoretical reform pedagogy publications on education (Kagan, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Aronson, 2001). Yet, the results of the small-scale study to be presented here (Section 4) seem to suggest that teachers rarely experiment with cooperative learning in their classes even if they consider the competences that it develops essential. The questions therefore arise:

What makes teachers change their beliefs about the aims and methods of language teaching, and what influences their classroom practice? The latter question will only be explored briefly and tentatively in this article.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Definitions of key terms

2.1.1 Culture and intercultural competence

Many scholars have tried to define culture and intercultural competence and their definitions are usually shaped by the scholars' educational context and influenced by the field of study they work in. A recent publication entitled *Global Perspectives on Intercultural Communication* (Croucher, 2017) gives a comprehensive overview of what intercultural communication means on different continents and for people with different religious, theoretical, political, economic or methodological orientations. This study cannot provide a full review of the latest works on intercultural competence due to space limitations; however, definitions of how the most important terms are understood and used in the present study are in order. Clarifications of the terminology will later be supplemented by the description of a recently published compositional model of intercultural competence in order to make its components more easily comparable to the expected learning outcomes of cooperative learning in Section 4.

In a Council of Europe publication, Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoint-Gaillard and Philippou (2014) attempt to define culture by dividing it into material culture such as tools, goods, foods or clothing; social culture consisting of language, religion, laws, rules of social conduct and folklore; and subjective culture including "beliefs, norms, collective memories, attitudes, values, discourses and practices which group members commonly use as a frame of reference for thinking about, making sense of and relating to the world" (Barrett et al., 2014, pp.13-14). In addition, and in contrast to earlier descriptions of (national) cultures, many professionals now seem to agree that "cultural identity includes our social identities based on cultural group memberships" (Croucher, 2017) and that "cultural groups are always internally heterogeneous groups that embrace a range of diverse practices and norms that are often contested, change over time and are enacted by individuals in personalised ways" (Barrett et al., 2014, p.13). This also entails that "... all cultures are dynamic and constantly change over time as a result of political, economic and historical events and developments, and as a result of interactions with and influences from other cultures and [...] their members' internal contestation of the meanings, norms, values and practices of the group" (Barrett et al., 2014, p.15).

Intercultural communicative competence has been seen by many language teaching professionals as an extension of communicative competence: "Intercultural competence is to a large extent the ability to cope with one's own cultural background in interaction with others" (Beneke, 2000, p.109). According to Byram's (1997) influential model, intercultural communicative competence requires certain attitudes, knowledge and skills in addition to linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence. The attitudes include curiosity and openness as well as readiness to see other cultures and the speaker's own without being judgmental. The required knowledge is "of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (p.51). Finally, the skills in Byram's model include skills of interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction as well as critical cultural awareness/political education.

Native-like competence as an aim of language learning has been re-evaluated and replaced by communicative competence, and subsequently by intercultural communicative competence by many professionals (e.g., Damen, 1987; Byram, 1997;

Kramsch, 1998; Corbett, 2003, Lange & Paige, 2003). Explicitly rejecting the native speaker model and a sole focus on teaching the target language Civilization for developing intercultural competence in foreign language teaching, Byram and Flemming (1998) claim that someone who has intercultural competence "has knowledge of one, or, preferably, more cultures and social identities and has the capacity to discover and relate to new people from other contexts for which they have not been prepared directly" (p.9). At around the same time in the United States, Fantini (2000) describes five constructs that should be developed for successful intercultural communication: awareness, attitudes, skills, knowledge and language proficiency. Furthermore, he also cites the following commonly used attributes to describe the intercultural speaker: respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, motivation, a sense of humor, tolerance for ambiguity, and a willingness to suspend judgment (p.28). Having reviewed recent publications on intercultural competence from around the world, Woodin (2018) highlights a shift of emphasis "from a focus on *cultures* to *culture*", and based on several other authors even goes further to claim that the focus should be on the *inter*, or, in other words, on interaction itself (p.3). She raises questions relating to the ownership of language and claims that language learning should not only be considered from cognitive and social perspectives but also from personal ones (Woodin, 2018, p.4). In addition, Woodin emphasizes that "non-Western conceptualizations of intercultural competence also place emphasis on the social, historical and political contexts in which intercultural competence is considered as well as raising questions of (in)equality" (p.27).

Intercultural (communicative or communication) competence is generally defined as "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive and behavioral orientations to the world" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p.7), similarly to many earlier definitions by Byram (1997), Moran (2001), Corbett (2003), Bennett and Bennett (2004) and Samovar et al. (2010) among others.

According to the Council of Europe publication where the compositional model of intercultural competence is taken from for the purposes of this study, intercultural competence is

> a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one, either singly or together with others, to:
> - understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself;
> - respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people;
> - establish positive and constructive relationships with such people;
> - understand oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural 'difference'. (Barrett et al., 2014, pp.16-17)

An abbreviated version of the components (the necessary attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding) of ICC listed in the same study (Barrett et al., 2014) can be seen in Table 1 in Section 4.

2.1.2 Cooperative learning

The most prominent authors who first defined and described cooperative learning seemed to agree that a teaching activity can be called cooperative when it corresponds to at least four basic principles (Kagan, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Aronson, 2001). The first of these principles is equal participation, meaning that every participant in the activity has equal opportunities for access to materials and for active participation. In every small group each participant should be granted a certain amount of time to contribute to the discussion. Sometimes this can be achieved with

the help of role cards and a specific task for each role. This way introverted students will not be marginalized by more confident speakers in the class, who otherwise tend to dominate discussions. Aronson (2001) goes as far as to blame the traditionally very competitive school atmosphere created by teachers' traditional frontal teaching for tension, bullying, and widespread physical and verbal aggression in schools.

The second principle is simultaneous or parallel interaction. In a cooperative learning environment there are many more interactions between students than in traditional frontal teaching because there are micro-groups of 2 to 4 persons working on their tasks, and everyone is involved and active throughout most of the lesson. Working in pairs or in small groups with specific tasks and roles for each participant is a structural guarantee that every person will be involved even when they do not necessarily want to be involved (Kagan, 1992).

The third principle is positive and encouraging interdependence, which means that the group members can only complete the given activity through cooperation because everyone's results depend on the work of their group members. Teachers can encourage learners to cooperate by structuring the activity so that they can only accomplish the set goals by working together and building on each other's contributions. A typical CL activity that builds on positive and encouraging interdependence is an information gap activity organized as an 'expert jigsaw' as described by Aronson (2001).

The fourth principle is individual accountability (Kagan, 1992), also called personal responsibility. For example, in jigsaw every group member will be responsible for one section of the material and will need to teach this section to the others. It will soon become clear that if they are not ready to teach it, their group mates will not be able to learn it and accomplish the task.

In Hungary, Arató and Varga (2008) published a resource book for teachers on cooperative learning with many practical examples of what can be done in the classroom to develop social competences. In the past 10 years pedagogy departments and methodology courses have often included CL in their textbooks and course materials in initial teacher education programs and in-service professional development events. In a comprehensive chapter on cooperative learning, Arató (2015) describes the advantages of CL and claims that

> teachers who focus on the structures of the learning process are likely to improve effectiveness, efficiency and equity in their everyday teaching and learning practice, [and] in a cooperatively structured learning process there is significantly more chance for every single learner to access common academic knowledge and the benefits of schooling. (2015, p.23)

He adds that the expressions of interest and shared responsibility within groups can result in conflicts but that these "conflicts are an important part of the learning process because they help explore the different dimensions of personal (self-esteem, motivation, mindfulness, reliability, etc.), social (empathy, tolerance, acceptance, patience, etc.) and cognitive (higher-level thinking, meta-cognitive skills, etc.) competences" (Arató, 2015, p.28).

2.2 Expectations from language teaching and teacher education in policy documents

In a report to the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture, the authors attempt to identify examples of good practice in language teacher education in Europe (Kelly et al., 2002). The criteria they used to define good practice were based on evidence that the practices concerned appear to be leading to improvements in language teacher training. Three out of the nine most important criteria they applied explicitly refer to the role of culture and intercultural communication in the training

of language teachers (pp.8-9). The authors of the report claim that emphasis on the European and intercultural dimensions of language teacher education takes many different forms and can be located, for example, in explicit course aims in institutional mission statements, curricula including courses on European and intercultural issues, participation in EU programs and student mobility schemes.

Language education policy has been influenced by the intercultural dimension in Europe since the 1980s. This is evident in the *White Paper on Education and Training – Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*, i.e., the basic document describing language teaching in the EU (European Commission, 1995). According to this document, aside from the obvious economic opportunities that language proficiency allows, other roles of language education include teaching and exploring a sense of belonging and identity and providing the key to knowing other people. Proficiency in languages helps to build up the feeling of being European with all its cultural wealth and diversity and of understanding between the citizens of Europe. Multilingualism is part and parcel of both European citizenship and the learning society (European Commission, as cited in Byram, 2003, p.7). As a result of a number of similar statements in various national curricula emphasizing the need to teach language and culture together, the guidelines provided by the educational policy of the Council of Europe in the *Common European Framework of Reference* (*CEFR)* have been stressing that there is an urgent need for educational reforms to incorporate cultural and linguistic diversity as well as education for democratic citizenship in the curriculum all over Europe (Council of Europe, 2001). It is also stated that one of the aims of language teaching should be to ensure that all sections of the population should "achieve a wider and deeper understanding of the way of life and forms of thought of other peoples and of their cultural heritage" (Council of Europe, 2001, Chapter 1.2, p.3). The *Common European Framework of Reference* gives a detailed description of the competences that language learners have to acquire in foreign languages during their school years (Council of Europe, 2001).

A reference study written for the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe (Willems, 2002) claims that if learners are to be involved in understanding other cultures in order to successfully communicate with people, then teachers need a training that does not only prepare them to focus on structures, lexis, functions and a few facts about the target language country, but also helps them teach their learners to deal with the complexities of intercultural communication (pp.7-10). Willems' study presents how the intercultural dimension of language teaching can be incorporated into language teacher education programs through examples of topic areas to be included and methods to be used with trainees who have the opportunity to spend a period of residence in a country where the language is spoken. The author also has suggestions for teacher educators in countries where residence abroad is not available for trainees for economic, geographical or political reasons.

More recent policy documents and reference books often emphasize the intercultural dimension of teaching within or together with global competence development. For example, UNESCO published a reference book on *Intercultural Competence* (2013) and an educational framework entitled *Global Citizenship Education* (2014). The aim of the latter is to help "learners to engage and assume active roles, both locally and globally, to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world" (p.15). Global citizenship education is guided by the aim to develop in learners the competences they need to respond to the challenges of the 21st century (UNESCO, 2014). The United Nations' *Sustainable Development Goals* (United Nations, 2015) and the educational materials they provide serve similar purposes. Most recently the OECD-PISA has started compiling tests to assess students' global competence, a construct that they define as "the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to

understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development" (PISA, 2017, p.7).

The Hungarian *National Core Curriculum* (Government of Hungary, 1996) prescribed the compilation of thematic collections for incorporating the ideals of democratic citizenship and intercultural education into the curriculum as early as 1996. Twenty years ago it already emphasized the importance of developing cultural awareness and an appreciation for people from other cultures as expressed, for example, in points 2, 3 and 7 of the general development objectives at the end of grade 10 (age 16) in foreign language learning:

> It is required that [...] 2) students be able to establish new personal relationships through the foreign language, and appreciate the people and culture of other countries; 3) students be given a demonstration of the culture, civilization and unique values of the target country (countries), and by comparing these to their own culture, develop a more complex notion of Hungarian culture; [...] 7) students' knowledge of a foreign language also help them to become European citizens. (Government of Hungary, 1996, official translation)

The 2005 edition of the *National Core Curriculum*, the highest level regulatory document concerning the content of curricula and the principles and conceptual basis of public education, is based on values centered around democracy, humanism, respect for and development of the individual, promoting cooperation of core communities (family, home country, Europe, the world), gender equality, solidarity and tolerance. According to their guidelines for the teaching of foreign languages (Government of Hungary, 2005), the development of communicative competence includes the development and maintenance of pupils' positive and motivated attitude to language learning, the learnt language, the people speaking that language, their culture and learning about other languages and cultures in general.

The latest edition of the Hungarian *National Core Curriculum* (Government of Hungary, 2012) also highlights the importance of intercultural understanding, intercultural skills, intercultural communication and intercultural competence in the sections entitled "Communication in foreign languages", "Social and civic competence" and "The principles and goals of teaching foreign languages". The wording in the latter is not very precise, however:

> The development of the general knowledge of the target language and intercultural competence: students must be able to interpret the differences between and similarities of their own culture and other cultures, and become more open and sensitive to other cultures. It is important to establish a positive attitude to and motivation for learning foreign languages and, in general, getting to know other languages and cultures. (Government of Hungary, 2012, p.48, official translation)

Policy documents do not usually recommend teaching methods to help achieve the expected learning outcomes they set. As a result, there is little information and guidance in curricula and other policy papers concerning the methods, approaches and techniques that are conducive to the development of intercultural competence.

2.3 Empirical research on the intercultural dimension in language (teacher) education

Although a significant number of policy books and theoretical articles have been published on the theory and the role of intercultural competence in foreign language education (see Section 2.1 above), the number of empirical studies that have

investigated foreign language teachers' perceptions of the intercultural dimension in foreign language classes, their beliefs concerning integrated language and culture teaching, and their current practices, is relatively low. Byram and Feng (2004) reviewed work on the cultural dimension of language teaching and concluded that little effort had been devoted to empirical research investigating the impact of the development of these new conceptual frameworks. They do not only underline the importance of building up a body of knowledge in this area but also emphasize the need for a research agenda in order to acquire a systematic knowledge of language-and-culture teaching, the development of intercultural competence, the relationship between linguistic and intercultural competence, and the effects of both on social identities (p.149).

In Europe, the first notable exceptions to the lack of empirical investigation in this field were a comparison of British and Danish teachers' views on the role of culture (Byram & Risager, 1999), and Sercu's study on the views of English, French and German teachers in Belgium (Sercu, 2001). The English-Danish project (Byram & Risager, 1999) was concerned with the views of 212 English and 653 Danish teachers of foreign languages. The instruments used included both questionnaires and interviews. The other study (Sercu, 2001) investigated the views of 78 English teachers, 45 French teachers and 27 German teachers in Belgium with the help of a questionnaire. These two studies underline a growing awareness amongst respondents of the significance of the cultural dimension in a multicultural Europe, and a clear readiness to teach both language and culture. Both studies seem to show that Danish and British teachers, like Flemish teachers, believe that their pupils basically hold traditional stereotypes, but are gradually developing more diversified ideas, as more and more of them have the opportunity to travel. Unlike the Danish and British teachers participating in Byram and Risager's research (1999), Flemish teachers in Sercu's study (2001) attach higher importance to tourism and Civilization. In all countries, teachers seemed to give low priority to topics such as international relations and the target language culture's significance for the students' country, or cultural values and social norms.

The majority of teachers in the above studies (Byram & Risager, 1999; Sercu, 2001) do not have a systematic plan as to how to teach intercultural competence, or how to handle stereotypes and prejudice in the foreign language classroom. When asked about the details of incorporating culture into language teaching, respondents in both Denmark and the United Kingdom say that they consider it important to promote the acquisition of knowledge, since more knowledge is considered to lead to more tolerant attitudes. With respect to the way in which the foreign culture should be presented, an interesting difference seems to emerge between British and Danish teachers. While British teachers think they should present a positive image of the foreign culture, Danish teachers opt for a more realistic presentation. Finally, as in the Belgian sample investigated in Sercu (2001), there is a tendency amongst foreign language teachers to give low priority to the encouragement of learners' reflection on their own cultural identity. Both Byram and Risager (1999) as well as Sercu (2001) conclude that foreign language teachers are clearly willing to teach intercultural competence, yet in their actual teaching practice they appear to favor a traditional knowledge transfer approach.

In a significant volume summarizing the findings of a large-scale international empirical investigation into the role of intercultural communication in language teaching according to foreign language teachers' perceptions, Sercu, Bandura, Castro, Davcheva, Laskaridou, Lundgren, Mendez García and Ryan (2005) explored the following questions: (1) How do secondary school foreign language teachers' current professional self-concepts relate to the envisaged profile of the intercultural foreign language teacher? (2) To what extent is current language teaching practice directed towards intercultural competence? (3) What factors influence language teachers' willingness to incorporate the intercultural dimension into foreign language education?

This extensive study (Sercu et al., 2005) was conducted on a sample of 424 language teachers in seven countries. The main findings reveal that the great majority of teachers in Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Mexico, Poland, Portugal and Sweden regard themselves as being sufficiently familiar with the culture(s) of the foreign languages they teach despite the fact that teachers in Poland, Bulgaria and Mexico have fewer possibilities for traveling. Nevertheless, according to this study, the participating teachers' profile does not meet all expectations regarding the knowledge, skills and attitudes expected of a foreign language and intercultural competence teacher. The objectives of foreign language teaching continue to be defined in linguistic terms by most teachers. The great majority of the respondents in Sercu's study focus primarily and almost exclusively on the acquisition of communicative competence in the foreign language. If and when they include culture in FLT, the activities they use aim primarily to enhance learners' knowledge of the target culture, and not to encourage learners to search for information or to analyze this information critically. A large number of the teachers claimed to be willing to integrate intercultural competence teaching in foreign language education, but the data also showed that this willingness is reflected neither in their teaching practice, nor in their definitions of the goals of foreign language education (pp.13-20).

According to Sercu's evaluation of their findings, the implications for teacher education are the following:

> Understanding teachers' perceptions and the reasons why they embrace or reject intercultural competence teaching is crucial for teacher educators who want to design (international) teacher education programmes which can clarify and exemplify to foreign language teachers how they can promote the acquisition of intercultural competence in their classes. Our findings highlight important differences and commonalities in teachers' perceptions. Both national and international teacher education programmes can build on these commonalities and have teachers from different countries cooperate, knowing that they all share a common body of knowledge, skills and convictions. They can also exploit differences between teachers to enhance teachers' understanding of intercultural competence. (pp.18-19)

In a study (Lázár, 2007) conducted among teachers in Hungary and three other countries, the main reasons why teachers fail to incorporate the intercultural dimension in English language teaching were their lack of first-hand experience of other cultures and their feelings of incompetence due to lack of training in the given area. Some of the participants blamed their coursebooks' deficiencies and others their own or their school's strong grammar and exam orientation. Novice teachers claimed to be preoccupied with classroom management and discipline issues or admitted having a poor repertoire of classroom activities with a cultural focus. Even the few participants who occasionally focused on the intercultural dimension of language teaching claimed to have difficulties "embedding" the activities in their lessons. Finally, and quite interestingly, some teachers had reservations about whether developing intercultural competence is the task of the language teacher at all (Lázár, 2007). What has happened in this field in Hungary in the past 10 years is not clear as no other large-scale study has been published on the frequency of culture-related activities in language classrooms and/or teachers' views on ICC since 2007.

A qualitative study (Lázár, 2011) exploring two Hungarian pre-service English teachers' beliefs about their role in the development of intercultural communicative competence examined what factors influence trainee teachers' beliefs and recommended action for reforms in teacher education based on the findings

about the many variables that have an impact on pre-service language teachers' personal theories about their role in developing intercultural competence.

A recent doctoral dissertation defended at the University of Pécs (Hungary) investigated the methods that the author's instructor colleagues used when teaching ICC in their compulsory lectures and seminars and what the teachers and students considered important and challenging in these courses (Menyhei, 2016). She found great variety in the teachers' teaching styles and concluded that the institution would benefit from determining a common approach to teaching and learning in the ICC courses. Menyhei (2016) also examined the students' views on the intercultural dimension and their development during her own seminars. Her course followed a social constructivist approach characterized by experiential learning including a number of CL activities that the students found unusual and challenging but enjoyable and useful.

The above results are not very surprising if we look at the courses offered by English language teacher education programs in the past decades. The intercultural dimension has not been incorporated for too long in teacher training. According to a document analysis (Lázár, 2013), in the 1970s and 1980s university-based English teacher training programs only offered target language civilization courses for future teachers in Hungary. In the 1990s, occasional optional courses on teaching language through culture and methodology of cultural studies appeared in the programs. In the academic year 2005/06, there were already several optional intercultural courses at many universities but 70% of all pre-service English teachers in Hungary could still graduate and become English teachers without learning anything about the development of intercultural competence (ICC). It was only in 2012/13 that ICC development became integrated in an increasing number of compulsory lecture courses, seminars and examinations for future English teachers in the seven university English teacher training programs in Hungary (Lázár, 2013).

A study conducted by Holló (2017) revealed that approximately 3% of the courses at a large university with a very good reputation in Hungary have intercultural content. In addition, it seems that many university instructors and managers still hold the view that

> interculturality and intercultural communication are buzzwords; they are devoid of any real meaning. Many get on this bandwagon to sell their ideas. Interculturality has nothing to do with ELT or teacher training. It is another dimension. Developing the acceptance of difference and the rejection of hate speech are part of the socialisation process, and the domains responsible are the family, churches, schools and beyond. (a program manager's views quoted in Holló's study; p.77).

How schools are supposed to teach the intercultural dimension if teachers are not taught about the aims and methods remains an unanswered question. It is also questionable how credible any program with compulsory courses on intercultural communication can be if the leadership does not unanimously consider such courses to be of value. Indeed, many instructors and lecturers who focus on the development of intercultural competence feel that they are forcing their students to "swim against a very strong current at a faculty where very few of their other courses incorporate the intercultural dimension" (Holló, 2017, p.75). As it can be seen from the above, there are still many instructors and education managers at universities who are not familiar with constructivist approaches to teaching and/or do not think very highly of the role of ICC development today.

3 Research methods of the small-scale study

3.1 Research design

This is a small-scale ongoing mixed-method research project consisting of a 90-minute professional development session for teachers and a survey filled out by the same teachers at the end of the session. The professional development workshop familiarized participants with the principles, tools and expected learning outcomes of cooperative learning, using cooperative structures to do so in order to provide a learning-by-doing experience as well as time for reflection for the participating teachers. The short survey filled out by the participants at the end of the session aimed to tap into their views on and practices of using CL in their classrooms.

3.2 Research questions

Based on the above, the following research questions were formulated to guide the investigation:

1. What do public school teachers know about cooperative learning?
2. What do they think cooperative learning develops?
3. Which components of intercultural competence are developed by cooperative learning?
4. How important do teachers find the principles and expected outcomes of cooperative learning?
5. How often do they use cooperative learning in their own classrooms?
6. What do they find difficult in implementing cooperative structures?

3.2 Participants and context

The seven workshops took place in different public schools in Budapest, Eger and Székesfehérvár (Hungary) either as stand-alone professional development sessions or within half-day or whole-day training events. The participants were 165 primary or secondary public school teachers, about 80% of whom were (mostly English) language teachers and approximately 90% had five or more years of experience in classroom teaching. A total of 128 of the 165 teachers responded to the survey. Those who did not either had to leave early or were unwilling to participate.

3.3 The workshops

The workshops on CL in the different schools were planned and facilitated by the researcher and always followed the same structure. The only minor differences in the program of the workshops were that in three cases a shorter version of the warmer described below was implemented because of a delay in the starting time and in two other cases the last activity had to be cut short because the previous discussions and activities lasted longer than had been planned. The language of the workshops was always Hungarian as this was the native language of all the participants.

At the beginning of each workshop, participants were asked to stand in one of the four corners of the room according to their knowledge of the principles and tools of CL. It was expected that although CL had been a buzzword in educational contexts for quite some time, few teachers would know exactly what it really meant. Still standing in the four corners, teachers were asked to form pairs or trios and discuss why they chose that particular corner. As a follow up to this warmer, the participants taught each other the principles of cooperative learning in an expert jigsaw activity with the

help of task sheets prepared in advance by the researcher-facilitator. Groups of four (or occasionally five) teachers were formed and re-formed on the basis of colours and numbers on their task sheets. This group work activity was followed by a short plenary session in which the competences that CL develops were elicited and put on the board.

The next stage was a group discussion at the end of which the groups answered the survey questions and drew an A4-size mind-map of their difficulties with the planning and implementation of CL. The rules of the group discussion required all participants to speak for a minute and to listen to each other actively as they had to summarize on the A4 size poster their partner's answers instead of their own.

The final stage of the workshop included a gallery tour in which groups had to visit each other's posters and ask questions or make comments. The workshop ended with a plenary discussion eliciting solutions for the difficulties written or drawn on the posters from each group in a word rotation manner, again ensuring that everyone got the floor at least once in each group and group members could not repeat the solutions that had already been presented by other groups.

The workshop used six different cooperative activities to teach about the principles and tools of CL in an experiential and reflective fashion: guided pair work, expert jigsaw, timed mini-presentations, partner's secretary, gallery tour and word rotation. This meant that in each 90-minute session, the participants experienced six activities that followed the principles of equal participation, parallel interaction, positive interdependence and individual accountability in the process of learning about CL.

3.4 Research instruments, data collection and data analysis

In the research process, Creswell's (2003) guidelines were followed in the data collection and analysis stages. The researcher-facilitator took notes in her diary after each session and the survey posters were also collected at the end of each workshop. The survey posters designed by the researcher-facilitator and piloted with a group of trainee teachers at university contained two closed-questions to which answers about frequency and importance could be marked on a Likert-scale. The third question on the survey poster was open-ended and asked the group to prepare a mind-map (as described above in 3.3) containing all the challenges or difficulties they would encounter or had encountered when using CL structures in their teaching (see sample in Appendix). The survey was in Hungarian, which was the native language of all the participants.

Simple descriptive statistics were used to calculate the frequency of CL activities in the participants' practice according to their self-reports and the extent to which they considered the principles and expected outcomes of CL important. Ideas in the mind-maps were grouped into categories and summarized in a radar diagram.

3.5 Limitations and further research

This pilot study analyzes the data collected with the help of a very simple research tool that showed the answers provided by a relatively small sample of 128 respondents, which obviously makes it impossible to draw far-reaching conclusions. On the one hand, the research tool can be further developed and, with the help of further professional development workshops, the number of respondents can also be increased. On the other hand, in a longitudinal study, follow-up interviews can be conducted with a selection of the language teacher participants of the different workshops to gain more in-depth answers and insights into what language teachers think about CL and its relationship to ICC and what factors influence their beliefs about teaching and their actual classroom practice.

4 Results and discussion

The presentation of the results of the small-scale study conducted among public school teachers in professional development workshops will follow the order of the research questions in order to clearly and objectively present and then discuss the findings concerning the participating teachers' knowledge about CL prior to the sessions as well as their views and everyday practice concerning CL, ICC and other competences they regard as essential in the 21st century.

The sessions were run very similarly and the participants also reacted very similarly in the seven different locations. In the warmer it usually turned out that all participants had heard about CL but only a few of them had any experience with it. Another finding recorded in the researcher's diary is that there was only one workshop where one of the participants could actually list as many as three of the four basic principles of CL before the beginning of the expert jigsaw activity which aimed to help teachers learn these principles. In all the other workshops, there was no one at the start who knew what principles a CL activity had to follow. To answer research question 1, the majority of participants had some vague knowledge about CL being some kind of group work but only one out 128 respondents could actually list some of the principles of CL.

Participants at all the workshops collected approximately the same list of features that CL develops. The list of expected learning outcomes from empathy to cooperation and responsibility featured prominently in the collections we put on the board in the training room. In Table 1, the components of ICC based on Barrett et al. (2014) and the features that CL develops according to the participants are matched in order to answer research questions 2 and 3. As it can be seen, nearly all of the components identified by Barrett et al. had a (near) equivalent in the participants' collection of what CL develops.

Shortened description of components of ICC based on Barrett et al. (2014)		**Features that CL develops according to workshop participants**
Attitudes	Valuing cultural diversity and pluralism of views and practices	Interest in the others' views
	Respecting people with different cultural affiliations	Acceptance
	Being open and curious about and willing to learn from others	Willingness to learn from each other
	Being willing to empathize with people with different cultural affiliations	Empathy
	Being willing to question what is usually taken for granted	Self-assessment
	Being willing to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty	Patience
	Being willing to cooperate with people who are perceived as different	Cooperation, responsibility

Skills	Multiperspectivity – the ability to decenter from one's own perspective	Looking at things from multiple perspectives
	Discovering information about others who are perceived as different	Learning from each other
	Interpreting others' practices, beliefs and values	Listening to and interpreting the other's opinion
	Empathy – the ability to understand and respond	Empathy
	Cognitive flexibility – the ability to adapt one's way of thinking	Flexibility
	Critical thinking in evaluating and making judgments about cultural practices	Critical thinking
	Adapting one's behavior to new cultural environments	Flexibility
	Using language to manage breakdowns in communication	Communication skills
	Plurilingualism to meet communicative demands	Not mentioned by participants
	Mediation – translating, interpreting and explaining	Interpreting the other's opinion
Knowledge and understanding	Understanding diversity and heterogeneity of groups	Understanding and accepting diversity of views and experiences
	Awareness of preconceptions, prejudices and discrimination	Not mentioned by participants
	Understanding of the influence of our own language and culture	Self-knowledge
	Awareness of differences in verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions	Knowledge about communication
	Knowledge of others' beliefs, values, practices, products and discourses	Learning about others' values and skills
	Understanding of interaction and knowledge construction	Knowledge about communication
Other		Time management
		Safe learning environment
		Motivation, responsibility, autonomy

Table 1. Description of components of ICC based on Barrett et al. (2014) with matching features that CL develops according to workshop participants

Out of the 128 participants in the survey, 122 (95%) found the principles and expected outcomes of CL very important or indispensable and only a total of 5% of the teachers considered these somewhat important or not important at all (see Chart 1). As for the frequency of CL activities in their classes only 7 (5%) of the teachers use them frequently and 60 (47%) claimed to use them sometimes (Chart 2). As the difference between rarely and sometimes was not specified in the research tool, it is probably safer to compare the proportion of teachers who considered the principles and expected outcomes of CL very important or indispensable (95%) and the proportion of teachers who say that they often use CL (only 5%). These figures answer research questions 4 and 5, and seem to mirror what often happens in education and in society as a whole: the values we stand for are often not reflected in our behaviour. Looking back at the study conducted by Sercu et al. (2005), we can draw a parallel as their data also showed that teachers' willingness to incorporate ICC in their teaching is reflected neither in their practice nor in their definitions of the goals of foreign language education.

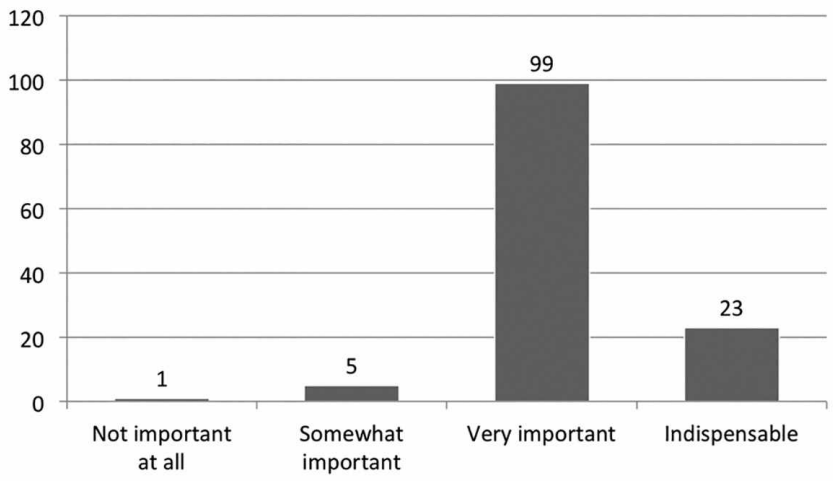

Chart 1. How important do you consider the principles and expected learning outcomes of cooperative learning? (n=128)

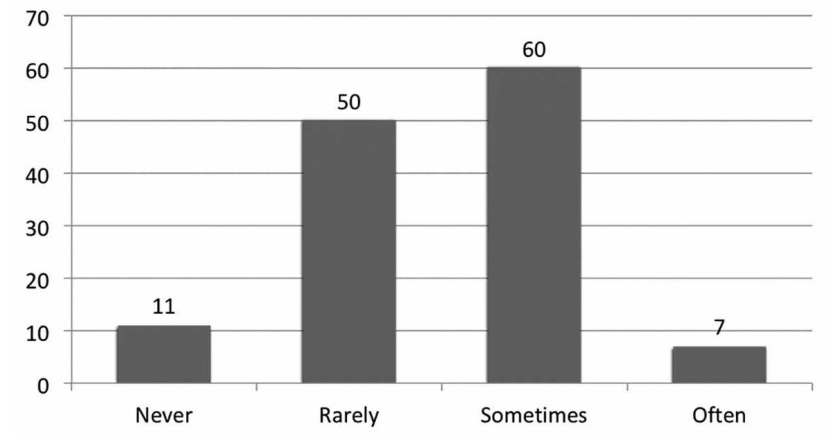

Chart 2. How often do you use cooperative learning in your classrooms? (n=128)

Another important question attempted to explore teachers' difficulties with implementing CL. The five most common challenges were 1) the time it takes to prepare and organize CL activities (22 out of the 32 groups mentioned this), 2) classes are very heterogeneous, mixed-ability classes (18 mentions), 3) students are not used to it, many are difficult to either involve or discipline (17 mentions), 4) there is not enough space in the classroom and/or not enough time in a lesson for CL activities (13 mentions), and 5) the number of students in a class is too high for group work (10 mentions). For a visual representation of the answers to research question 6, refer to Chart 3.

Other difficulties that were mentioned by only a few of the 32 groups included

- lack of students' interest, experience, motivation, responsibility, ability to cooperate
- students' selfishness, misbehaviour, tendency to start conflicts
- lack of tools (posters, cards, markers)
- too much noise
- difficulties in assessment (how to give grades on group work)
- teacher's difficulty in monitoring cooperative pair and group work activities

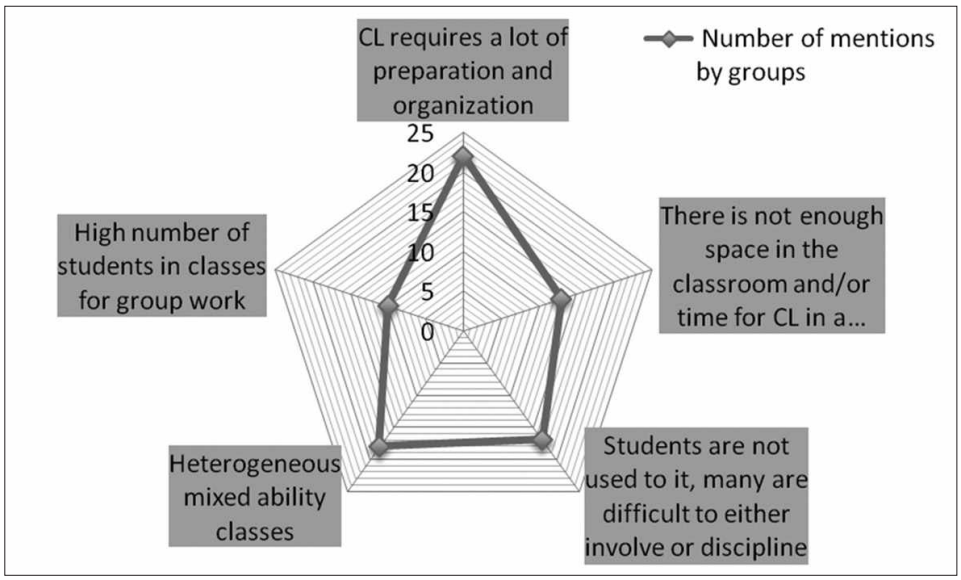

Chart 3. What difficulties do you (or would you) encounter when using cooperative learning? (n=32 groups of 3, 4 or 5 members)

It is interesting to note that many of the difficulties teachers think they would have with CL, especially the ones involving students' motivation, responsibility, autonomy, empathy and other personal qualities and attitudes, correspond precisely to the features that CL develops much more than traditional frontal teaching as described in Section 2.1.2. Another point of observation worth reflecting upon is that many of the difficulties and challenges listed by the participants focus on outside factors such as their students' abilities and behaviour or lack of time, space and resources. No group of teachers mentioned what may be some of the largest obstacles in the way of changing classroom practices, namely teachers' own reluctance to let go of traditional routines involving tighter control over what is happening in a classroom and their unwillingness to take risks by experimenting with something new even if it promises to develop the competences they consider essential. These findings are in

line with the results of the empirical studies by Lázár (2007, 2011) and Menyhei (2016) in Hungary and with the findings of Sercu et al. (2005) in a wider international context.

5 Conclusion

This study attempted to explore what policy documents require from learners relating to intercultural competence, what public school teachers know about, think of and do with cooperative learning in Hungarian classrooms in 2019, and whether CL develops or would develop the learners' intercultural competence. A small-scale study does not allow us to draw far-reaching conclusions but it is interesting to note that the great majority of the 128 participating public school teachers in this research had only vague ideas - if any - about the rules and principles of CL at the start of the workshops, despite the fact that CL had long been included in pre- and in-service teacher education programs. However, once they were familiarized with the principles and techniques of CL in the experiential workshop described in detail in Section 3.3 of this study, the participants could easily list all the competences and qualities that CL develops which, in turn, seem to correspond to a large extent to the attitude, skill and knowledge components of ICC adapted from Barrett and his colleagues (2014). However, according to the majority of the participants' self-reports they rarely use any cooperative structures in their lessons, despite the fact that they find the expected outcomes of CL very important or even essential for the development of their learners.

When describing the difficulties and challenges they encounter or would expect to encounter in implementing CL in their lessons, other than complaining about the time invested in preparing and organizing these activities, teachers tended to blame external factors such as a lack of resources or the students' selfishness, misbehaviour, inability to cooperate and lack of motivation to actively participate. Ironically, if teachers were to incorporate more cooperative structures in their lessons, it is precisely these qualities, skills and attitudes that they would be developing in their learners.

As a follow-up to the research described here it will be important and interesting to investigate why teachers did not even mention their own reluctance to reduce the amount of time devoted to frontal teaching in their classrooms and their own unwillingness to take risks by organizing the teaching-learning process along different lines from those we call 'traditional' and by encouraging a more learner-centered approach conducive to the development of intercultural competence, among other benefits. To this end, follow-up interviews are planned with a selection of the language teacher participants of the different workshops to gain insights into what factors influence teachers' beliefs about the aims of language teaching, the most efficient teaching methods and teachers' actual classroom behaviour.

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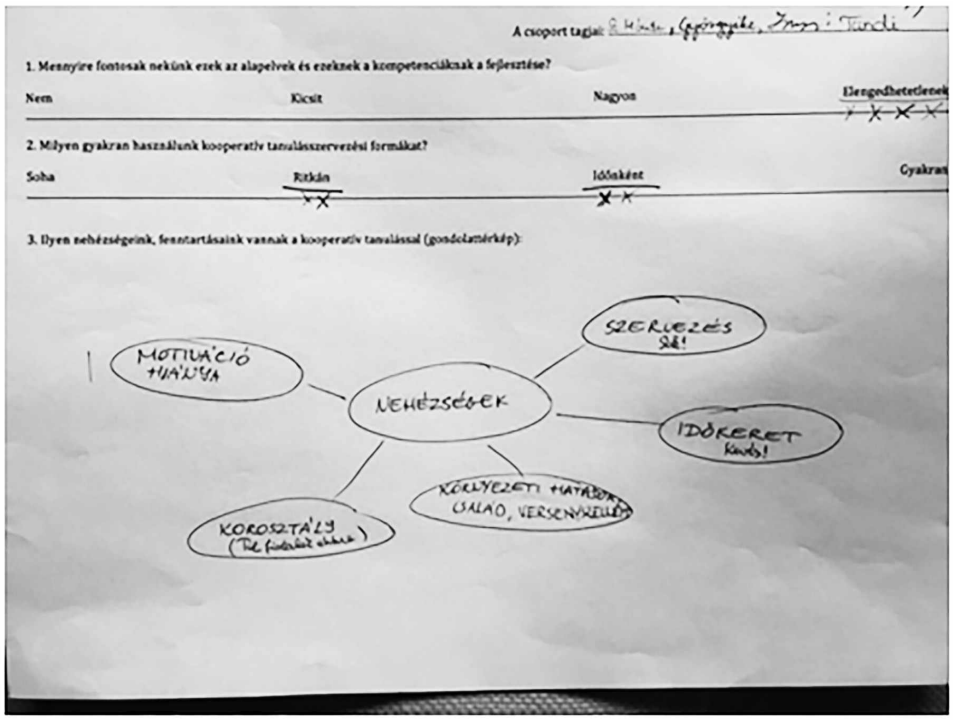
APPENDIX

Sample survey poster filled in by a group of participants in one of the workshops



Author data: Ildikó Lázár is a lecturer at Eötvös Loránd University, offering courses on English language teaching methodology, cultural studies and intercultural communication in the BA, MA and PhD programs. She has also worked as a researcher, materials writer, editor and workshop facilitator in several Council of Europe, Comenius and Erasmus projects and NGOs. She has been coordinating a community of practice for teachers' continuous professional development for happy schools on a voluntary basis in Budapest for six years.